

INDEXA



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Peter I 2006 — Getting there is the story!

By Erling J. Wiig, LA6VM

DEPARTURE

During the last days of January 2006, and after three years of preparation and delays, the Peter I expedition 2006 was finally on its way.

The 22 Team members from the Americas and Europe gathered in Punta Arenas at the Straits of Magellan, and on 1 February boarded a Dash 7 turboprop for the 3 ½ hour flight to the Chilean Frei Base on King George Island in the South Shetland Islands. That is where the expedition vessel, MV DAP Mares was at anchor waiting for us.

After a short tour of the base, we boarded the ship, a 1600 ton vessel converted for Antarctic expedition support. The conversion included a helipad, extra passenger facilities and cargo handling gear.

As soon as the team was situated onboard, antennas were erected, transceivers were set, and XR9A/MM was activated for the transit. That evening we sailed out of Maxwell Bay, for the 860 nautical mile voyage to Peter I. Onboard were the Team members, the helicopter pilot and his two mechanics, plus the ship's crew of 22 men. The twin-engined helicopter had a 1100 lbs. cargo capacity or 4 passengers, in addition to the pilot.

After sailing west in the Bransfield Straits we continued into the open Bellingshausen Sea. The weather was fair, but with gale force winds and 20 ft waves. As the wind picked up we noticed a handful of Alba-



3Y0X—Peter I Island—2006

trosses on our stern, Antarctica's tireless gliders. A few whales and some icebergs were also seen. We encountered no sea ice—quite favorable for this season.

LAND!

After averaging a speed of 10 to 11 knots we approached Peter I on the evening of February 5th. After having seen the island on the ship's radar for some time, all team members were on the bridge when the grey shadows of the island emerged out of the evening fog. Their cheers were as joyful as any ancient explorer traveling at these latitudes, seeing new land!

We sailed around Cape Eva and

anchored in Anderssen Bay, some 3 nm off the north west coast. Our QTH-to-be, Radiosletta (Radio Plains), could be seen in the fog, however no landing attempt was possible due to fog and wind. Radiosletta was named after the first radio amateur expedition to Peter I in 1987—3Y1EE and 3Y2GV.

The next day the weather conditions improved somewhat, but still not enough for flying. In the afternoon we made a recon flight, however the pilot was only willing to circle the northern tip of the island, Cape Eva. The Team members were on the bridge all day long, discussing

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visibility and cloud ceiling, flying or no flying conditions. We were so close, but unable to land, it was a tense situation! The next day the pilot agreed that we had conditions for flying. The landing operation could begin! At the first flight we had to survey Radiosletta to check for crevasses. Radiosletta is actually 200 to 300 ft thick ice shelf sliding down from the central mountain massif, and crevasses could be expected. We quickly decided on the campsites, dropped a red bag for visual reference, and landed at what would be our Main camp.

The first cargo, our basic survival gear and some food, was unloaded, and the helicopter lifted off to return to the ship for more. The basic survival equipment included a light tent, sleeping bags and food, in case weather or other circumstances should leave some Team members on the island before the camp was properly established. Weather stayed fair, and flight after flight brought more Team members, shelter materials, and boxes of equipment, drums of gasoline and water, and propane gas bottles. All together, some 15 tons of goods were to be transported from the ship to shore—a major landing operation as pictured below.



Shortly, the untouched ice shelf was spotted with countless pieces of cargo. Then a lone petrel came sailing over us at low level, and I could see it was looking from side to side, surveying all our gear. What could it be thinking..?

ESTABLISH CAMP

We established two campsites, the Main camp and Op B. The Main campsite would have the MEG tent (Meeting, Eating, Greeting), two sleeping tents and the OP A tent, the OP B site only the OP B tent. The



Shelter preparation was the first order of business.

tents were standing on floors made of 4x8 ft plywood sections, comprising 12 x 24 ft bases for the bigger tents and 12 x12 ft for the smaller tents. The tents have a steel base frame screwed to the floor sections, aluminium tube arch-frame, and were covered by one or more layers of fabric and insulation. Stakes were driven into the snow for securing the tents to the ground. Provided correct assembly, the tents are very sturdy and will endure the harshest weather conditions. The weather to come would prove the quality of both construction and installation!

OP A had the CW stations, using mostly vertical antennas; a Force 12 vertical dipole for 20m and ¼ wave verticals 30m and 40m, a 2el. SVDA for 17m, the Battle Creek Special for use on 160m, and a DX Engineering vertical for 80m. OP B had the SSB stations using three 2-element SteppIR beams each for 20, 17, 15, 12 and 10 m, a Force 12 Sigma 80 vertical dipole for 80 m, and ¼ wave verticals for 40 and 30m.

During the landing operation, the weather condition began to deteriorate, and the pilot called off the flying. We were still missing three

team members, some radios and most of the gasoline, but we had the major items needed to complete the camps. As weather picked up, we got OP B ready with two stations, and we were QRV. Peter I was on the air again after 12 years of silence! At the Main campsite, the MEG and sleeping tents were set up, while the weather was really coming up harsh. Suddenly we had a major storm, with sleet and rain, and wind clocked on the ship with gusts to 100 mph. When the night fell, many of us hunkered down the best we could, cold and wet. During the night, the wind slammed and tore at the tents, and the thought crossed our minds that if we lost the tents we would be very, very vulnerable. But the tent construction, the tie-downs and guying, were designed for this kind of weather, and proved to be of the right sort. We did not get much sleep that night, but as summer nights are short at these latitudes, you are not supposed to sleep much anyway.

The weather kept on the same way during the next day, and we had a hard time doing what had to be done. Walking in the 10-15 cm (4-6 in) deep slushy snow was hard especially while carrying materials, boxes, etc. We raised the OP A tent in the storm, and it took all available hands to get the covers in place. Raising

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antennas in a storm is also tricky, but with properly placed guy-ropes and working carefully with the wind, even a storm becomes a breeze! In the afternoon we had OP A QRV, and celebrated the important milestone with burgers, hot dogs and a soda. The weather was still so harsh that we could not see the OP B from OP A. Although the path was marked with nightglow marker flags, we required two persons when walking between the two sites. We suffered yet another stormy night, however without incidents of any kind.

After three days on the island, at 2330 local time on February 10th, the weather changed and the remaining equipment and team members were flown in. By the next afternoon the camp was finally completed, most stations were up, and normal operating shift plan was implemented.



Clear weather at last!

OPERATING

We were working 3-hour shifts, taking into account our respective preferences of modes, bands and areas to work. Russ, KI4NFF, our photographer and newly licensed ham, would be all over the place making photos and videos, and preparing some of these for uploading to our website: www.peterone.com. Charles, our traveller and "the World's Most Travelled Man" proved to be a proficient helicopter cargo dispatcher, and an important liaison with the Spanish speaking crew of the ship.

We were happy to see that the band conditions were pretty good with long openings to all parts of the world. The signals were not very

strong at times, but at least stations were coming through, and the number of QSOs was really building up at a rate of over 10,000 per day.

After the camp was fully established our logs were uploaded to our webpage so that everyone could check status of their QSOs. Uploading log data, as well as our almost daily photos and video was accomplished with Iridium satellite phones. The necessary equipment and satellite air-time was generously provided by the Iridium Satellite, LLC. The up-link was accomplished using 4 multiplexed phones, to provide the required bandwidth!



K4UEE lets us know that INDEXA was there.

EQUIPMENT

Our equipment worked flawlessly. The station setup included ICOM IC 756 Pro III transceivers with Alpha 99 linear amplifiers. A LAN with a wireless link interconnected OP A and OP B.

Running several stations at the same time in close proximity was possible by using ICE bandpass filters, physical separation of the two operating sites, and different antenna polarizations. A problem with interstation interference arising after a few days was traced to moisture in the coax connectors. After cleaning the connectors, the problem was solved.

WEATHER

At Peter I, as expected weather turned out to be a major factor. It delayed achieving full operational status for a few days. Only a few times did we experience calm and

clear weather, and they were days apart. We had to start tearing down the camp earlier than planned, because of a bad weather forecast for our projected departure date. The team and most of the equipment was taken off the island two days early. The bad weather showed up on schedule and as a result it took us another 4 days to finally remove the last few loads of equipment off the island. Only then could we finally depart and head for home. When we got back to King George Island we had to wait almost four more days for good flying conditions to get back to Punta Arenas, Chile. Almost 1/3 of the expedition time was spent waiting on weather!

EPILOG

We made a total of 86,891 QSOs, including 114 on 2m EME. We also had one QSO with a station that is absolutely "out of this world"—a 2m QSO with NA1SS on the International Space Station.

It was just fantastic to be at Peter I Øy. The Island displayed all of its specialties, from the horrendous storms, with rain, sleet, snow and thick fog, to sunny, warm and calm weather. The beauty of the mountain wall behind the camp, the troll's face up the slope and the ragged Cape Ingrid has been imprinted on our minds forever.

We'll all never forget the overwhelming pileups, the "wall of sound" created by you—the deserving—trying for hours to get through to us. For us it was a thrill of a lifetime! Please be assured, that we tried our very best to copy YOUR callsign, because YOU were very important to us. Also, we tried to keep you informed about our operation, to give you the best chance to be there at the right time. And we hope the website photos, updates and the videos helped you enjoy the same experience we were enjoying.

We really hope that we got YOU in our log! —73 Erling

The torch is passed...

Judy Roush (AA7UC) has asked to be relieved of her duties as President and Newsletter Editor of INDEXA to deal with some family health issues. Judy's position of President will be filled in the interim by Ron Wright (ZL1AMO) until elections occur later this year. John Scott (K8YC) will assume the position of Newsletter Editor.

Judy became President following Murphy Ratterree's death in September 2002.

During Judy's tenure, the newsletter

was converted to an email format for all those who could receive it in that form. Production cost savings of the email edition has resulted in more funds being available to support DXpeditions. In addition, full-colored photography can now be viewed in the email edition of the newsletter.

Judy also helped organize the successful drive for an air ambulance to return Ron Wright to his home where he could receive proper medical attention. Ron fell ill while giving the amateur radio community an opportunity to work one of the more difficult-to-get DX entities.

Under Judy's watch INDEXA provided support for many DXpeditions including Guinea, Chatham Island, Southern Sudan, Marquesas, Myanmar, Annobon, Europa, Peter I, Bhutan, Chesterfield Islands, Somalia, Andaman Island, and Kure Island.

Our thoughts are with you, Judy. Thank you for your contribution to the overall well-being of INDEXA.

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